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Talks to continue in Ellensburg regarding potential organic food commission

OLYMPIA – A work group assembled by the state Department of Agriculture (WSDA) will continue to evaluate issues surrounding the establishment of an organic food commission when it meets Oct. 17 in Ellensburg. The meeting is scheduled from 10 a.m. to noon at the Hal Holmes Center, 201 N Ruby. Members of the WSDA organic advisory board, which meets at 1 p.m. the same day, have been invited to share insights on how a commission may promote the growing organic industry.

At the meeting, participants will review ideas that came from a meeting held Sept. 26. At that time, viewpoints ranged from commodity commission representatives stating that organic apple growers are benefiting from commission promotions, to organic growers noting that a new commission could better promote the unique practices and benefits of organic farming.

The work group has discussed state laws regarding formation of commodity commissions. The group also has reviewed the results of two surveys WSDA conducted on the potential for an organic food commission. The Organic Food Commission Work Group includes organic producers and members of commodity commissions.

WSDA was directed by the Legislature during the last session to evaluate the feasibility of forming the commission and to report findings to the Legislature in December. Legislators asked WSDA staff to evaluate procedures that could be used to establish a commodity commission, review current commission programs that benefit organic producers, examine the needs of the organic food industry, and recommend potential legislation and methods of funding.

“WSDA is providing the organic industry with information on industry trends and state laws that should help them evaluate the pros and cons of forming a commodity commission,” said Miles McEvoy, manager of WSDA’s Organic Food Program.

Questions about the Organic Food Commission Work Group may be directed to Miles McEvoy by phone at (360) 902-1924 or e-mail mmcevoy@agr.wa.gov; or Deborah Anderson, Administrative Regulations Program, at (360) 902-2043 or danderson@agr.wa.gov. For more information, visit the department’s Web site at <http://www.wa.gov/agr/FoodAnimal/Organic/comproj.htm>.

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